

LOW FRICTION HANGER SYSTEM AND HANGERS FOR USE THEREWITH

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to improvements in the
5 current system and methods that are in place for hanging
clothes or other items that utilize a two or more piece system
that incorporates at least a hanger and a supporting type rod
or equivalents. The invention allows for easier movement of
the hanged material and allows for more even distribution of
10 the hanged material.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

When one looks at magazines or television programs that
highlight closets, one might notice that the clothes are
15 typically shown hanging very neatly and separated and evenly
spaced to give a tidy and organized appearance. In reality,
very few people have closets where the clothes naturally hang
the way they are depicted in the magazines. If one were to
look at most people's closets, one would notice that more than
20 likely the clothes are clumped together with the hanger tops
close and angled in a way that gives a disorderly appearance.
In addition, when the user attempts to move clothes that are
hanging in the closet in an effort to remove a particular
article, sometimes a great amount of force and balance is
25 required, particularly if many articles of clothing are to be
shifted. This can be difficult, particularly for the elderly
and the handicapped, and can make it very difficult to remove
clothes, especially if the closet is full of hung items.

Besides using hangers to hang garments, there are other
30 applications for hangers and rods, such as using hangers to
hang other items, including hanging storage bags for

prescription medications in pharmacies, folders for papers, just to name a few.

An important objective of a commercial outlet, such as a clothing store or boutique, is to make browsing through the products as easy as possible. While the invention is clearly not limited to garment hangers and a system, herein the example clothing on garment hangers will be used. With current hanger systems, many garments will hang on the same rack, which can require many hung garments to be moved when seeking to view and/or remove a specific garment. Also, in the case of circular clothing racks, a large number of units of hung clothes may need to be shifted. It stands to reason that if garments can be moved on a hanger with less effort, this will be advantageous since it will help a customer to view potential purchases more easily, making that customer less likely to walk away without first looking through everything they came to see. Many stores have employees who, as a part of their responsibilities, have to constantly move garments in an effort to cater to their customers. If the moving of multiple garments can be made easier and require less effort, this may lessen the possibility of repetitive physical stress to the employees which can in turn increase employee productivity and job satisfaction.

There accordingly remains a need for a system for making it easier for people to keep hanged items more evenly spaced apart from each other and easier to move on hangers on the rack.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The invention utilizes a friction lessening means or material located on at least one of the hook portion of the

hanger and the rod where the hook portion of the hanger and the rod make contact in order to reduce friction and decrease the amount of force needed to move the hanger on the rod.

5 In addition; the invention preferably allows the hangers to evenly distribute themselves either through the natural attributes of physical science and through mechanical design (e.g., springs) or by magnetic repulsion, by implanting magnets with similar polarity embedded in the body of the hanging system.

10 In practice, a user will hang his or her clothes on a hanger of the invention and then place the hanger on the bar or rod. In the case where the friction lessening feature is on the hanger neck, the portion of the hanger neck with the friction lessening feature will make contact with the bar and
15 will ride on the bar. The friction lessening feature can comprise a roller element, including a ball bearing or plurality of ball or roller bearings structures. As used herein, the term "roller element" is defined to mean any mechanical friction reducing mechanism, which can include but
20 is not limited to wheels, ball bearings and rollers. The friction lessening feature can also include a low friction piece of material such as Teflon®, carbon, carbon polymer or other materials located on an underside of the hanger neck where it contacts the bar or rod. Alternately, the low
25 friction feature can be located on an upper portion of the bar or rod, and, for example, can comprise low friction material such as Teflon®. As used in this application, the term "friction reducing material" or "low friction piece of material" is defined as an insert which lowers the frictional
30 coefficient that would otherwise be there had the material not been included. The friction lessening feature will help with

the problem of multiple hangers on the same rod bunching up. Indeed, instead of bunching up together as a result of friction holding the hangers in place, as is the problem with prior art hangers and rods, the hangers of the invention will
5 be able to move more naturally to a position of natural equilibrium as there is little opposing resistance from the contact point of hanger and rod with the significant reduction in friction.

In addition, it is foreseeable that under certain
10 circumstances relatively heavy items, such as heavy coats, and other items put onto these hangers may result in a vertical load that might overcome part of the benefit afforded from the friction-reducing feature of the invention. To address these types of situations, a further feature of invention can
15 include a means to provide an ancillary external lateral force that will aid the natural tendency for adjacent hangers to spread apart. This ancillary external lateral force means can be in the form of an embedded magnet or a mechanically designed arm that is integrated into the hanger and which act
20 as a force feature that would work laterally in aiding in the spreading apart of adjacent hangers.

The invention includes an embodiment where the friction-limiting device is a separate device, e.g., a sleeve with an integrated friction-diminishing device built into it that can
25 be attached to retrofit any existing hanger. This separate device can be attached to the hook portion of any existing hanger as a retrofit. Moreover, the friction lessening feature can be built directly into a rod or can be provided as a retrofit device that can be attached to at least a top edge
30 of the rod to provide for decreased friction.

The invention also includes a method for making hangers

self-align on a rod, wherein a very low friction contact is established between a hanger and a hanger rod and wherein optional mechanical and/or magnetic repulsion means are used to aid in the self-alignment feature.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a prior art hanger on a prior art clothes rod.

10 FIG. 2 is a plan view of one exemplary embodiment of a low friction hanger of the invention.

FIG. 3A is a detail showing the hook portion of an exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the hanger of the invention having a single roller.

15 FIG. 3B is a detail showing the hook portion of an exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the hanger of the invention having a single roller that is more integrated into the bottom of the hook portion.

20 FIG. 4 is a partially exposed detail showing the hook portion of an exemplary embodiment of a low friction retrofitable cover for hanger hooks installed on a hanger hook.

25 FIG. 5A is a detail showing the hook portion of a further exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the hanger of the invention having two rollers.

FIG. 5B is a detail showing the hook portion of a further exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the hanger of the invention having three rollers.

30 FIG. 6 is a detail showing another exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the hanger of the invention having a wheel.

FIG. 7 is a detail showing an exemplary embodiment of a retrofitable low friction feature of the hanger of the invention for installing on a hanger hook.

5 FIG. 8 is a perspective view showing an exemplary embodiment of a low friction cover being attached to a top portion of a hanger rod.

10 FIG. 9 is a side view showing one exemplary embodiment of a mechanical separation displacement mechanism of the invention.

FIG. 10 is a side view showing one exemplary embodiment of a magnetic separation displacement mechanism of the invention.

15 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The invention is now described with reference to the drawings. FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an exemplary prior art clothes hanger 10 on a prior art clothes rod 12. The clothes hanger 10 has a hook portion 14 connected to a lower hanger portion 16. An underside of the upper hook portion 18 will make contact with an upper surface 20 of the rod. Prior art garment hangers can be formed of bent wire, metal, wood, plastic and/or papers and other materials. The hook portion can be integral with the lower portion and is typically formed of plastic, wood or metal. Clothes rods are typically made of wood, metal or plastic. There is often a considerable amount of friction between where the hook portion rests on the rod, and particularly when heavy items are carried on a garment hanger, a considerable amount of force may be needed to move clothes hung on a hanger on a rod.

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FIG. 2 is a plan view of an exemplary embodiment of a low

friction hanger 30 of the invention. Low friction hanger 30 has a hook portion 32 with an upper hook portion 34 having low friction material 36 located on an underside thereof. This low friction material can comprise, for example and without
5 limitation, a hard and slick plastic material such as Teflon®. Distance adjustment means 38 to provide for self adjustment of the distance between adjacent hangers can optionally be provided on the hanger, e.g., at a portion below where a neck
40 of hook portion joins an upper portion of a generally
10 triangular shaped lower hanger portion 42. The distance adjustment means 38 can comprise, for example, permanent magnets which act in synergy with the friction reducing feature and are aligned such that the magnetic fields of adjacent hangers will repel each other, and thus provide a
15 motive force to assist in self-aligning hangers. (see FIG. 10)

FIG. 3A is a detail showing the hook portion 50A of an exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the hanger of the invention comprising a roller element in the form of a single roller 52 below the upper hook portion 54. The roller
20 52 will preferably have a concave curvature that will accommodate a wide variety of different sized rods and will permit even hangers carrying heavy items to be easily moved on a rod with little lateral force required. The precise shape of the roller can be modified as necessary. Also, as is shown
25 in FIG. 3B, roller 54 can be incorporated more fully into the upper curved portion 52 of the hook portion 50B for stylistic and sizing considerations. Again, as used herein, the term "roller element" is defined to mean any mechanical friction reducing mechanism, which can include but is not limited to
30 wheels, ball bearings and rollers.

FIG. 3B is a detail showing the hook portion of an exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the hanger of the invention having a single roller that is more integrated into the bottom of the hook portion.

5 FIG. 4 is a partially exposed detail showing the hook portion 60 of a hanger (not shown) which has its upper portion 62 covered with an exemplary embodiment of a low friction retrofitable cover 64 for hanger hooks. The retrofitable cover 64 can be preformed of low friction material, such as
10 Teflon® and can be designed to slide over the free end 66 of hook portion, and thereby imbue a convention hanger with low friction attributes.

FIG. 5A is a detail showing the hook portion 70 of a further exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the
15 hanger of the invention having two roller portions 72 incorporated into a lower side 74 of the upper portion 76. Each roller portion 72, can, for example have rolling bearing members, such as ball bearings 78 which will freely roll and establish low friction contact points with the rod (not
20 shown).

FIG. 5B is a detail showing the hook portion of a yet further exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature of the hanger hook 80 of the invention having three roller elements 82, 84 and 86 located on an underside 88 of hanger hook with
25 roller 84 preferably arranged directly under a center of gravity CG of the hanger, and will be straddled by roller elements 82 and 86, which can be relatively widely spaced apart to accommodate hanger rods of a wide variety of dimensions.

30 FIG. 6 is a detail showing another exemplary embodiment of a low friction feature 90 of the hanger of the invention,

which has a wheel roller 92 that has a smaller contact area 94 and smaller profile than the wider rollers 54 of the embodiments of FIGS. 3A and 3B. The wheel roller 94 is rotatably affixed to an upper hook portion 96.

5 FIG. 7 is a detail showing an exemplary embodiment of a retrofitable low friction hanger device 100 of the invention. The retrofitable feature comprises a roller bearing 102 rollably affixed to an affixation portion 104. Although depicted as a hollow curved tube section 106 for slipping over
10 the upper portion of a hook portion of a hanger, it can be in the form of a clip structure which is adapted for affixation to the underside of a hanger hook if desired, or another structure. Furthermore, other types of rolling members can be provided.

15 FIG. 8 is a perspective view showing an exemplary embodiment of a low friction cover 120, which is adapted to fit over at least a top portion of a hanger rod. In the embodiment shown, the low friction cover (e.g. made as hard or silica plastic or metal) has shape that comprises a portion of
20 the outer shell of a cylinder, and can be adapted to snap around the rod 122 and/or can be affixed there with adhesives (e.g. peel and stick type, etc.) Other lower friction cover shapes can comprise, for example, a narrow strip, and can be formed of durable, yet low friction material, such as a hard
25 and slick plastic such as Teflon®.

FIG. 9 is a side view showing an exemplary embodiment of a mechanical separation mechanism 130 of the invention. The exemplary mechanical separation mechanism 130 can comprise arms 132 which extend from at least one side, and preferably
30 both sides 134 and 136 of the hanger 138, for example, in the region of the hanger just below where the hook portion hangs

on the rod. The arms 132 can comprise, for example, springs which provide a lateral pushing force that will act upon an adjacent arms 132 of adjacent hangers if the hanger is too close, and thereby cause the other hangers to move to
5 establish more equal spacing between hangers on a rod. Although springs are shown, resilient material, such as elastomeric sponge material, air cushions, plastic arms, or other structures and designs can be utilized.

FIG. 10 is a side view showing an exemplary embodiment of
10 a magnetic separation mechanism 150 of the invention, fitted onto two adjacent hangers 152 of the invention. The magnetic separation mechanism 150 can comprise pairs of permanent magnets 154 and 156 aligned with their like polarities facing each other (e.g. the north or south sides facing each other)
15 so that a South (or North) magnetic field is set up at both sides of the hanger, which will repulse other hangers with a like magnetic separation mechanism 150. One advantage of using pairs of magnets adjacent to each other with like polarities facing each other is that no matter which direction
20 a hanger is placed on a rod, a repulsive magnetic force will be established.

Of course, it is also possible to use single permanent magnets in each hanger, and have sets of hangers that would pair of hangers with N-S polarity alignment and S-N alignment.
25 In this arrangement, hangers would have to be placed in a closet with the two different types of hangers arranged for magnetic repulsion, such as N-S, S-N, N-S, and S-N. This is clearly less desirable than pairs of magnets since more attention would need to be taken when hangers are placed on a
30 rod, since if two hangers have the same polarity alignment (e.g. N-S and N-S) where to be placed adjacent to each other

on a rod, the hangers would tend to be drawn together. As shown in FIG. 2, one or more of the permanent magnets can be used in the hanger of the invention, depending on how much repulsive force is desired.

5 Having thus described exemplary embodiments of the present invention, it should be understood by those skilled in the art that the above disclosures are exemplary only and that various other alternatives, adaptations and modifications may be made within the scope of the present invention. The
10 presently disclosed embodiments are to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive.